



# Fact Sheet

## Contact Information

## Food Security in Guatemala

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### Food Security exists when.....

"...all people at all times have both physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and health life." (USAID Policy Determination No. 19, April 1992) This definition focuses on three distinct but interrelated elements. All three are essential to achieving food security.

- **Food utilization:** proper biological use of food, requiring a diet providing sufficient energy and essential nutrients, potable water and adequate sanitation, as well as knowledge within the household of food storage and processing techniques, basic principles of nutrition and proper child care and illness management.
- **Food access:** adequate resources to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet, which depends on income available to the household, on the distribution of income within the household and on the price of food.
- **Food availability:** sufficient quantities of food from household production, other domestic output, commercial imports or food assistance.

The impact on a society of food insecurity is far-reaching and lasting because chronic malnutrition in children under three years old causes irreversible physical and mental damage that limits their ability to learn and to perform in school, impedes the impact of basic health services, and restricts children's ability to grow into productive adults. In the past six decades, child malnutrition has cost Guatemalan society US \$3,128 million in loss of health, education, and productivity ([//documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/liaison\\_offices/wfp127796.pdf](http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/liaison_offices/wfp127796.pdf))

### United States foreign assistance committed to food security:

United States Government (USG) assistance is designed to make a difference in the lives of the hungry and poor. It is based on the premise that only a long-term, sustained collaborative effort will bring down the unacceptably high levels of chronic malnutrition that precludes Guatemala's ability to pursue its potential as a prosperous peaceful society.

### Food Security in Guatemala:

The levels of food and nutrition insecurity are high. Guatemala has the highest national levels of chronic malnutrition (49%) in the American hemisphere which is higher than many African nations.

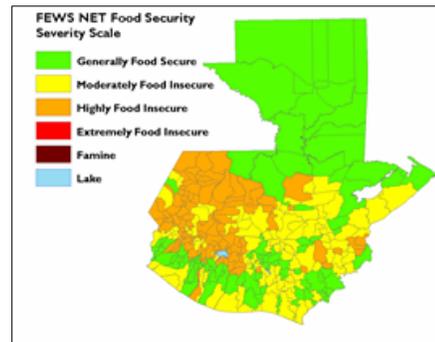
The highest levels of food and nutrition insecurity are in the highlands and some areas in the east (orange-shaded zones in Figure 1). The eastern zone is located where there is recurrent drought and non-irrigated agriculture faces severe obstacles. The highland is sloped and isolated with a single maize harvest per year and reduced income generating options.

Chronic malnutrition among children is persistent and has strong ethnic and geographic dimensions—it is concentrated among the indigenous. The relative levels of 69% in indigenous populations and 35% among non-indigenous have changed little since 1995.

In 2001 a height census conducted among first grade students showed that more than 51 percent of elementary students in half of the country's 332 municipalities suffered from both moderate and severe stunting, this being the clearest indicator of food and nutrition insecurity. Most of these municipalities are predominantly indigenous, located in the highlands, and some have total stunting rates of over 80%.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) conducted socioeconomic studies to identify the groups that are most vulnerable to stunting. Results show that landless rural families and small-scale farmers are the groups most affected by food insecurity in the country.<sup>1</sup>

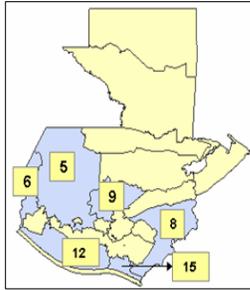
**Figure 1.** Current estimated food security conditions (February 2007)



<sup>1</sup> GUATEMALA Food Security Outlook. USAID/MFEWS/Fews Net. (February to July 2007). [www.fews.net/guatemala](http://www.fews.net/guatemala).



The high vulnerability groups are differentiated by agro-climatic endowments but share similar patterns of labor migration and problems with access to land. All groups suffer from inadequate access to land for food security and need off-farm income from seasonal migrant work on coffee and sugar cane harvests to survive.



Price increases reduce poor households' access to food. According to the 2005 livelihoods study conducted by USAID/MFEWS and partners, in the highest food insecurity zones—highlands in zone 5 (Quiché and Huehuetenango) and the Ch'orti area in zone 8, in Chiquimula and Zacapa departments—poor households purchase 75 and 70 percent of their food respectively, making them very vulnerable when basic food prices increase (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Livelihood zones where purchase represents over 50 % of food source for poor households.  
Source: FEWS NET

### Programs that work to improve food security and livelihoods.....

At current rates of progress, it would take 20 years to eliminate stunting among the non-indigenous and 83 years among the indigenous. An estimated 1.8 million people currently face food insecurity. Of these, about 1.7 million people are receiving some type of food aid, but not necessarily on a permanent basis or meeting their nutritional needs. Nearly 500,000 children benefit from school feeding programs.<sup>2</sup>

The USAID Food Security Program uses resources to reduce food insecurity for at-risk Guatemalans. The basic premise of the programs is that local and national governments will assume stronger and more effective roles in directing resources toward their at-risk populations; mothers will possess the knowledge to better maintain their own nutritional status and that of their children under two years of age; and, that families in food insecure areas will be able to diversify their income by engaging in higher value market production and their community infrastructure will be improved which will reduce their marketing and other transaction costs. The Food Security Program coordinates with USAID programs in education, health, democracy, local governance, enterprise and trade as well as with Government of Guatemala (GoG) entities (SESAN—Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition and the MOH--Ministry of Health), international organizations (United Nations FAO—Food and Agriculture Office and WFP--World Food Program) and local NGOs to reduce food insecurity.

The Program is implemented by three partners: Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Save the Children, and SHARE/Guatemala, who together form the basis for outreach to the rural poor in San Marcos, Baja Verapaz, El Quiché, Huehuetenango, and Chimaltenango departments. In target municipalities with the highest chronic childhood malnutrition, the Program integrates income generation and maternal/child health interventions that reduce food insecurity while improving the family's livelihood and health. Specifically, USAID implementing partners use food aid rations for targeted supplementary feeding for 6-36 month-old children and pregnant/lactating women while they work with families to improve and diversify agricultural production (including soil management and conservation practices), micro-enterprise and marketing activities that augment on- and off-farm income sources. Using Food for Work and other resources, limited activities are underway to improve infrastructure in food insecure areas to ease communities' access to markets and to lower business transaction costs.

Implementing partners enhance their food security interventions through close collaboration with international donor, NGO and GoG efforts such as the MOH Integrated Strategy for Care of Prevalent Diseases among Children and the Integrated Strategy of Mother and Child at the Community level (AIEPI-AINM-C).

### Further Information:

[www.usaid.gov/gt](http://www.usaid.gov/gt)

[www.usaid.gov/gt/cross\\_cutting](http://www.usaid.gov/gt/cross_cutting); [www.usaid.gov/gt/photos\\_cross\\_cutting](http://www.usaid.gov/gt/photos_cross_cutting) (photos); [www.usaid.gov/gt/pubs\\_cc](http://www.usaid.gov/gt/pubs_cc) (studies)

[www.fews.net/guatemala](http://www.fews.net/guatemala) and in Spanish: [www.fews.net/centers/innerSections.aspx?f=gt&pageID=monthliesDoc&m=1002386](http://www.fews.net/centers/innerSections.aspx?f=gt&pageID=monthliesDoc&m=1002386)

[www.crs.org](http://www.crs.org)

[www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)

[www.savethechildren.org.gt](http://www.savethechildren.org.gt)

<http://www.sesan.gob.gt/sesan/>

[www.share.org](http://www.share.org)

[www.wfp.org](http://www.wfp.org)

<sup>2</sup> GUATEMALA Food Security Outlook. USAID/MFEWS/Fews Net. (February to July 2007). [www.fews.net/guatemala](http://www.fews.net/guatemala).